

MONTAGUE NIBLETT (1878-1967)

The Surrey commons and open spaces were the haunts of Montague Niblett for many years until failing eyesight and limbs forced him to stay at home. It was on one of these commons that he met H. J. Burkill and joined the London Natural History Society in 1926. The attraction was the Plant Gall section of the society for Niblett had been gathering plant galls and rearing the inhabitants for several years. It will be remembered that Connold and Swanton had published works on the British plant galls in the years 1908-1912.

Niblett's ability for rearing the small Cynipidae was encouraged by his new friends. The section had been formed in 1917 during the First World War by a committee that in the previous year had seen the publication, by its leading members, E. B. Bishop, L. J. Tremayne and H. J. Burkill, of a paper "Additions to the List of British Plant Galls" in the *Entomologist*. But Niblett had started rearing Cynipid flies some years before 1914 and had had some bred insects sent to Dr. Hedicke of Berlin for identification. The hymenoptera group of gall-causing Cynipidae fascinated Niblett because of their interesting life histories of which some were known at that time to have alternate generations—the flies being distinct from each other in two succeeding generations—through Adler's work, translated by C. R. Straton in 1894

Niblett was ably helped by Burkill and by J. Ross, the Joint Secretary of the Society during the First World War, a man of many natural history interests. Between them they gradually took charge of the Plant Gall section and besides being the main contributors, compiled an annual report on Plant Galls in Britain, published in the *London Naturalist*, and paid special attention to the rearing of Cynipidae. Niblett was more concerned with research into the life histories than in the distribution of the galls and their causers. He experimented and in his studies discovered the previously unknown alternate generations of several species of *Andricus* besides confirming earlier discoveries of others. During the Second World War he donated a very fine series of galls and the insects bred from them to the British Museum (Nat. Hist.) and this material formed the basis of the excellent Handbook on these British Cynipidae in the Royal Entomological Society's series by R. D. Eady and J. Quinlan. His papers on these gall causing hymenoptera cover a period of a quarter of a century. They appeared mostly in the *Entomologist* but some were in the *Proceedings of the South London Entomological and Nat. Hist. Society* which he had joined in 1930.

The rearing of diptera from galls was also tackled and Niblett's friendship with H. W. Andrews who also reared Trypetid flies must have helped to widen the interest to the other Trypetidae that do not cause galls. He read a paper on "Dipterous Galls" to the London Natural History Society in 1930 and a few years later papers on the Gall Midges (Cecidomyiidae) and the Trypetidae to the South London Ent. & Nat. Hist. Society. Many papers followed those on the Cecidomyiidae mostly in the *Entomologist* and those on the Trypetidae in the *Entomologist's Record*. His main paper, in the *Entomologist's Record* of 1939, "Notes on the Food-plants of the Larvae of British Trypetidae", have been quoted by almost every author dealing with this family since then. His bred specimens of Cecidomyiidae were presented a few years ago to the British Museum (Nat. Hist.).

Although he admitted to being "no linguist", he persevered in learning

French and German so that he could follow the many scientific papers that reached him from a world-wide circle of correspondents. He was especially indebted to the South African Trypetid expert, H. K. Munro, and from his writings was able to prepare papers on the galls of South Africa and the Mediterranean area that he read to the South London Ent. & Nat. Hist. Society.

Each December he planned his programme for the next year—dates and localities where he hoped to find galls, etc. These plans gradually included the rearing of diptera of families other than the Trypetidae and Cecidomyiidae. Messrs J. E. Collin and K. A. Spencer identified Anthomyiidae and Agromyzidae respectively for him and he made several discoveries of the plant hosts of species. One Agromyzid, a previously undescribed species of *Melanagromyza*, was named after him by Mr. Spencer.

During these many years until failing powers kept him at home he was always willing to read papers to the London societies including the Royal Entomological Society of London of which he was a Fellow from 1946 to 1964. Every year he conducted small parties of enthusiasts at field meetings. He regularly took the trouble to prepare exhibits for the indoor meetings and always expounded in a concise manner. He never refused to help young students or more experienced entomologists, making gifts of separates and specimens. His fine work and ability was recognised by the South London Ent. & Nat. Hist. Society by his election to the Presidency for 1936 and in 1965 by his appointment of Honorary Membership. The London Natural History Society had made him an Honorary Member in 1961.

His cloth cap (so different from the top hat his father, a City of London Accountant, used to wear), and side slung haversack, with his neatly clipped moustache, were easily spotted at the field meetings. More memorable perhaps was his slow wise talk in the railway train, a compartment emptied of all but staunch entomologists, by the clouds of powerful smoke from his pipe, as a few journeyed home from Victoria, after a meeting of the Royal Entomological Society or another London society.

He greatly missed these meetings when he became 'house-bound'. Although his eyes were failing he spent much time re-reading the *London Naturalist* and the *Proceedings of the South London Ent. & Nat. Hist. Society* with the aid of a large magnifying glass. He bore his long illness patiently and when the glass became of no use he loved to talk of old times and hear news of his old friends and of the events of the London Societies.

After some years at Cambridge where he reared lepidoptera gathered after bicycle rides to Chippenham Fen and other localities, he continued his occupation as a scientific instrument maker in the London area and during the Second World War became an instructor at the Training Centre at Waddon.

His rearing pots, his collection of galls and insects, he maintained in a wooden shed in his small garden. His family to whom he was devoted, and by whom much loved and revered, tolerated his special gardening with 'sleeved' small oaks, etc. His son and daughter mourn a good father, who died a great grandfather and a sincere friend of many entomologists. His wife predeceased him in 1937. To these is extended a deep sympathy.

L. P.